

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 279 049

CS 505 519

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TITLE Aristotle, Motion, and Rhetoric.
PUB DATE 86
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Communication Association (77th, Atlantic City, NJ, April 30-May 3, 1986).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Audiences; Language; *Motion; Persuasive Discourse; *Philosophy; *Rhetoric; Rhetorical Invention; Speech Communication; *Theories
IDENTIFIERS *Aristotle; Metaphysics; Postmodernism; Reality

ABSTRACT

Aristotle rejects a world vision of changing reality as neither useful nor beneficial to human life, and instead he reaffirms both change and eternal reality, fuses motion and rest, and ends up with "well-behaved" changes. This concept of motion is foundational to his world view, and from it emerges his theory of knowledge, philosophy of nature, ethics and social philosophy. This theoretical underpinning also led to the production of Aristotle's "Rhetoric," and in fact gives meaning and significance to the art of rhetoric, otherwise delegated to deceitfulness and trickery. Just as motion has been shown to exist in the universe, so too must this principle be operative in rhetoric. Because of the complex relations between the perception, opinion, and thought Aristotle uses to confirm the existence of change, rhetoric is an instance of motion. Rhetoric, then, becomes a latent threat to the maintenance or justification of the "status quo." That is, thought and speech is forever on the move. In Book II of "Rhetoric," Aristotle discusses the audience as a psychologically knowable and finite quantity, whose beliefs--mere opinions in themselves--are nevertheless available as objects of certain knowledge. Discourse would comprise a body of statements that are logically mimetic of reality. For a statement to achieve its purpose of communicating the substance of a thing, the units of meaning in language must exist in a stable and univocal relationship to their objects. Aristotle's theory of rhetoric contains on its fringes another dimension, a world view of changing reality that has yet to take hold in postmodern Aristotelian rhetoric. (NKA)

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Aristotle, Motion, and Rhetoric

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern
Communication Association, April 30-May 3, 1986, Atlantic, NJ

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Aristotle, Motion, and Rhetoric

One of the great gifts of the Renaissance was the discovery of ancient writings and, particularly, those of Aristotle. Even though their discovery remains an important contribution to Western civilization, their interpretations placed such limitations on classical theories that another "renaissance" was in order. This became apparent as soon as the methods of interpretation were challenged. Generalizing the Renaissance pattern of inquiry, Bernard Weinberg labels it a "methodology of fragmentation."¹ In this method, lines or passages of a text are isolated. In doing so, the Renaissance interpreters failed to take account of a "comprehensive picture" of Aristotle. After a few hundred years, this habit of gathering citations irrespective of Aristotle's philosophy had consequences in assessing the point of the Rhetoric. A good example was the nineteenth century's misconception that rhetoric was a handbook of speaker's techniques and tricks with no concern for value or moral truth.² Among students of rhetoric, this conception is inadequate, misleading, and annoying.

Concerned by misconceptions, modern scholars of rhetoric support a different view grounded in a "comprehensive picture" of Aristotle's philosophy.³ William Grimaldi uses Aristotle's constant references to establish the position that the Rhetoric cannot be understood by isolating the text.

"[The] references to his other works such as the Organon, Ethics, Politics, Poetics (55a 8-9, 56a, 25-31, 56b 6-11, 72a 1-2) certainly imply that the Rhetoric must be read within the context of the principles and the ideas which [Aristotle] has established in the body of his philosophical work." *

Hence, twentieth century reinterpretations of Aristotle are warranted for two interrelated reasons. First, Aristotle repeats basic ideas from text to text. Second, with this repetition, he has created an interlocking network. As has already been implied, it is theoretically important to communication theory to study Aristotle's works on logic, ethics, and politics and apply them to Aristotle's Rhetoric in an "anti-Renaissance" way.

While modern interpreters consider Aristotle's school of thought when reading the Rhetoric, the scope of his school of thought is not given complete consideration. That this is so becomes evident if we focus on the general subjects and thematic concerns said to comprise the "comprehensive picture." Here the discussions primarily spell out issues related to practical human affairs (e.g. moral purpose, practical wisdom, rational principle, truth, and justice) obviously oriented toward the Rhetoric. However appropriate, fitting, or "connected" these references are to understanding the Rhetoric, nevertheless, the "total" approach remains only an inclusion of relevant material out of the social dimension and an exclusion of what would later become the dimension of exact science. On a more specific point, the Physics is missed in the assessment when interpreting the "totality" vis-a-vis the Rhetoric. Perhaps the discussion of the

Physics is not included because, for example, any relationship between the criterion of goodness and the laws of the universe are unseen. But it is important to keep in mind that the "physics" that Aristotle talked about deals with such questions as these: "What is reality?" "What are the origins of the universe?" When Aristotle answers these questions, he crafts an intimate relationship between the criterion of motion or regularity and the one of goodness.

Thus, while the ethical, political and logical treatises deserve strong concentration, to leave it there is to be a one-dimensional reader of a multi-dimensional writer. The idea of a "comprehensive picture" is centered on the fact that Aristotle builds on basic concepts thereby establishing interconnections with the group of texts as a whole. Isolated inspection through one dimension misses the total pattern. If my analysis is correct, the "comprehensive picture," as practiced, is not enough.

As one might expect from this discussion, we would also need to understand Aristotle's way of looking at the universe. Others implicitly substantiate this position." For Abraham Edel, it is clear that Aristotle's cosmic assumptions are integral to the development of his works: "In working in any one domain he [Aristotle] seems to carry with him a web of specific theory developed in other domains, so that the ramification of one part of knowledge on other parts of knowledge are always near the surface." This means that Aristotle shows sensitivity to biology

in ethics and politics and to physical laws in logic. As such, we can expect an unusual sensitivity in rhetoric such as the relationship between motion and writing speeches. In what follows, I will further our understanding of a "comprehensive picture" by elaborating on how Aristotle looked at the universe. As I will show, his vision of the universe had a profound influence on his theory of rhetoric. Accordingly, the basic difference among the rhetorics of Gorgias, Plato, or Isocrates lies in each individual's vision of the universe.

In this essay, I will begin to articulate another dimension of Aristotle through the pivotal concept of motion. Two questions will be answered briefly today. First, how does the study of motion contribute to our understanding of this interlocking network? Second, what does motion have to do with rhetoric? Before we begin to answer these questions, we need to understand motion broadly, at least to avoid confusion with Galilean-Newtonian and other physicists' claims on its meaning.' Once we historically locate this concept and philosophically place its role within the disputes among the intellectual giants, we can clarify the relationship between motion and rhetoric.

As for the definition of motion, the key ideas are change, process, and transformation. The many differences among kinds of change aside, an important similarity is that there is no open-ended change. There is an end or goal toward which something is moving. With this in mind, motion is a concept that not only allows Aristotle to study nature but also to define reality

teleologically.' As we will soon see, the range of the term motion also includes every aspect of human life.

At the time Aristotle writes, there is battle going on about the nature of reality. Some say, such as Heraclitus, everything is change, in flux, by chance, or of chaos. We can relate this vision of the universe to the concept of motion by recalling Heraclitus' slogan: You cannot step in the same stream twice. As the familiar phrase has it, "everything flows and nothing abides, everything gives way and nothing stays fixed." (fr. 12) Others say, such as the Pythagoreans, that mathematical structures underlay all phenomena. Plato generalizes this permanent structure as the Forms or Ideas. In this vision of the universe, the nature of reality is constituted by eternal and unchanging universal patterns capable of being grasped by mind. Thus the antithesis of eternal reality undermines the thesis of change. Once undermined, the claim for eternal reality was further strengthened with Zeno's paradoxes.'

Given that the free thinkers' energies were captured by one of the opposing views, it becomes clear why Aristotle devotes such a large portion of the Physics and Metaphysics to the thesis of change and the antithesis of rest. All arguments being in on both sides, the debate demanded a response. By Aristotle's standards, the worth of each conceptual scheme must be judged by what it can do. Accordingly, the end result of each philosophy on political life, ethical choice, and the arts must be noted in the response. Judged by the final outcome, each position

represents idle talk, empty and even harmful to practical affairs of human beings. First, we will explore the thesis of changing reality along with its horrendous consequences on human affairs. Then we will turn to the antithesis of eternal reality and see what little it has to offer to the human experience.

To choose a world vision of "changing reality" means advocating that all statements are true. In the Metaphysics, Aristotle is quick to point out that "nothing could possibly be said truly about what is always and every where changing."¹⁰ This being the case we have to reckon with a meaningless universe. In fact, Aristotle uses Cratylus to address this issue. Since language must exist in a stable and univocal relationship to their objects, Cratylus believes that language misleads us in to communicating reality. Because of that, nothing can be said about what is always changing. By disparaging speech, Cratylus is forced to an absurd solution. Instead of talk, he wiggles a finger. Wiggling a finger symbolically represents the flux of the universe.¹¹ While some of us may prefer that Superpower leaders wiggle their finger rather than speak a Rambo language, the fact remains that we use language meaningfully and purposefully. Whereas one can hold to a world vision of changing reality in an Utopia, Aristotle observes no one holding to this vision in the real world. We act out our daily existence and maintain political communities as though truth and justice existed in the universe. For example, take the case of the man who wants to go to Megara.¹² If there

is no meaning in the universe, Aristotle asks why would he bother to go at all. Instead, when he gets up in the morning, why not wander into a well or fall off a cliff? As practiced or taught, human beings do not speak as if there is no stability in the universe nor do they act that way.

After Aristotle concludes that the world vision of changing reality is neither useful nor beneficial to human life, he finds the alternative no better. If the universe is at rest, some things said will always be true, and some always false. But this is not so. A case in point are speakers themselves.¹² The deliberative orator makes preferential recommendations and so needs to be attentive to the future. Moreover, these recommendations differ in contexts. One time something may be preferred for being scarcer, or more abundant, longer in duration, easier to attain, or harder; and again will not be. Speech shows that civil society and its constitutional structures can be moved, can change.¹⁴ For Aristotle, nothing is more known, more obvious, than the experience of motion.¹⁵ To deny motion is to destroy science, opinion and perception.

To maintain that all things are at rest, and to disregard sense-perception and the theory to be reasonable, would be an instance of intellectual weakness: it would call in question a whole system, not a particular detail; moreover, it would be an attack not only on the physicist but on almost all sciences and all opinions, since motion plays a part in all of them.¹⁶

What, then, does Aristotle say about the nature of the universe? Without falling into the absurd traps of either front,

Aristotle reaffirms both change and eternal reality and resists making a case for one or the other. He fuses motion and rest and ends up with "well-behaved" changes. The primary way Aristotle understands the changing universe is to find out what happens universally or for the most part. In short, the eternalist strain is very strong as he seeks the exhibition of regularity or order.

This "plan" or "design" operating in the universe has several features. First, this plan is not a comprehensive whole world plan as Hegel or Christian theologian would have it. Aristotle's universe is a heterogeneous one, an assemblage of separate systems sometimes possessing independent or clashing poles. Thus, it is pluralistic rather than monistic. A second feature is inherency and substance. What each system strives to do depends on its nature. That is, the treatment of motion is the realization of the embodied "program" of each separate system. Additionally, violence or distortion is not behaving naturally to this regularity. A third feature is the standard of goodness. Through proper regularity, or the criterion of motion, the one of the good can be detected. ". . . nature creates nothing without a purpose, but always the best possible in each kind of living creature by reference to its essential constitution. Accordingly if one way is better than another that it is the way of nature."¹⁷ Through the strands of complex linkages, Aristotle's ethics follows from postulating separate "systems" in the world. According to the "plans," changes take

place in organisms, individual persons, and societies. The good, he says, is whatever the nature of a thing aims at as its end (teleos). It may seem strange to think of the feature of regularity together with moral connotations. But the teleological model has not yet collided with Darwin, statistical concepts in scientific laws, or a conception of the good irregardless of an inherent makeup.'*

Aristotle's concept of motion, is as we have seen, foundational to his world view and, at that time, the culmination of metaphysical speculation. From that emerges a theory of knowledge, philosophy of nature, an ethics, and social philosophy. This theoretical underpinning also led to the production of the Rhetoric.'* It is precisely this foundation that gives meaning and significance to the art, an art otherwise delegated to deceitfulness and trickery.

As indicated, Aristotle's world view can be traced in his theory of rhetoric. Just as motion has been shown to exist in the universe, so too must this principle be operative in rhetoric. Aristotle affirms this: "Now if there is such a thing as false opinion or opinion at all, there is also motion; and similarly if there is such a thing as imagination, or if it is the case that anything seems to be different at different times; for imagination and opinion are thought to be motions of a kind."" Michael Buckley considers this to mean: "Even to assert a conclusion or to suggest an opinion is to move from initial premises to their consequences in thought and speech.""

Motion occurs in rhetoric through the demonstration of propositions."² Because of the complex relations between perception, opinion, and thought Aristotle uses to confirm the existence of change, rhetoric is an instance of motion. This also means rhetoric is a latent threat to the maintenance or justification of the status quo. That is, thought and speech is forever on the move.

With that in mind, Aristotle tames the flux of the universe with the principle of rest. Just as stability is affirmed in the universe, so too does this dimension operate in Rhetoric. Aristotle's elaboration of a probability rhetoric should in fact be regarded as a collary to his commitment to stability in change. In Book I of Rhetoric, the enthymeme is distinguished from the syllogism on the grounds that it depends on a merely probable premise. However, probability carries with it the burden of the past. Public opinion, as the source for major premise, constitutes the nature of reality and the possibility of "truth" dwelling in the flux. Aristotle, in effect, frees meaning from its dependence on occasion by proposing that the true purpose of language resides in the imitation of a reality that preexists the moment of speaking. Language discovers the truth; it does not constitute or summon into being its subject matter. The expressive possibilities of language must therefore take second place to Aristotelian logic, a privileged repertoire of formal operations that eventually come to occupy the entire field of rhetorical persuasion."³

All of this this presupposes Book II, in which Aristotle discusses the audience as a psychologically knowable and finite quantity, whose beliefs, mere opinions in themselves, are nevertheless available as objects of certain knowledge. As an orator, Aristotle can be assured of his persuasiveness because although he traffics in opinion, he can at least be certain which opinions will produce assent in his audience. The realm of the merely probable in Aristotle's Rhetoric is thus circumscribed within a more extensive realm of certain knowledge: knowledge of the audience, of human nature.

Aristotle's world view can therefore be said to imply a two-step invention process in rhetoric consisting as such: First, of the discovery of a structure already, in fact, eternally there in the world, and subsequently, of its expression in language. This aspiration for strict correspondence between language and reality, crucial of language is really to tell the truth, will determine the strictures on style Aristotle lays down in Book III of the Rhetoric. His obvious preference is for the plain style. Aristotle views stylistic effects as simple ornament and allows for their use to enforce the persuasiveness of the argument of a speech only so long as the figures of poetry do not obscure a clear understanding of the facts of the matter. The persuasiveness of speech depends on faithful re-presentation of a reality outside language.

As a result of Aristotle's solution to the crisis in metaphysical speculation,²⁴ twentieth century rhetoric confronts

its own crisis, encapsulated in the older metaphysical context. I will discuss one aspect of this crisis and then offer suggestions for future research in rhetoric.

To start, when Aristotle synthesized the theories of constant change and of eternal reality, he did so precisely in order to insure the possibility both of a stable truth immanent in nature and a language capable of expressing it. For Aristotle, stable reality, always immanent in nature, reveals itself as such when it is abstracted from the sensible world and embodied in human representations. Discourse would therefore comprise a body of statements that are logically mimetic of reality (just as the structure of tragic drama, according to Aristotle in the Poetics, is experientially mimetic of the human situation). For a statement to truly achieve its purpose of communicating the substance of a thing, the units of meaning in language must exist in a stable and univocal relationship to their objects. For Aristotle, there need be no discrepancy between the "substance" of a thing and a discourse that would communicate that substance because, as he puts it in De Interpretatione: "Just as written marks are not the same for all men, neither are spoken sounds. But what these are in the first place signs of are the same for all." That is, sound directly symbolize the same mental experiences. Although he did not have the concept of the sign (language re-presents the world), for Aristotle expressions indicate things as they "are."

We can get a better grasp of what Aristotle is saying by

showing the differences between him and modern philosophers. In contrast to Aristotle are Nietzsche's, Heidegger's, and Foucault's views about the nature of reality. For the modern group, the separation of reality from a language about reality must be rejected. Concerning this, these thinkers raise complex issues of which only complex responses would be adequate. However, for purposes of simplicity, suffice it to say that, for them, language is not an innocent reservoir holding truth. Because of that, language is an accomplice in the maintenance and formation of truth or reality or being. Indeed, these theorists pose reality as language-centered and human-made.

Whether in agreement with modern philosophy or not, these claims weaken Aristotle's theory of rhetoric, just as we can say that Newtonian physics weakened Aristotle's physics. This being the case, what power can Aristotle's Rhetoric possibly hold in post-modern thought? Aristotle's battle with Heraclitus and the Pythagoreans contains a lesson and perhaps an answer to our question. Aristotle has argued that were it not for the principle of motion, its opposite, eternal reality would freeze opinion, science, and thought into rigidity. But, if the principle of motion were to displace "stable truth" with complete change, the later would suicidally live out the consequences: the destruction of all meaning. Perhaps Aristotle's Rhetoric can withstand the forces of modern philosophy. Here is a possibility.

First, what is needed is to go to "war" with the

correspondence theory of reality and minimize, but not eliminate, the eternalist strain in Aristotle's world view. Following that, Aristotle's theory of rhetoric would be disassembled. To do such a thing would mean not relying on the traditional opposition of style and content. In the traditional point of view, "content" implies some stable and permanent referent--in other words a reality--a fixed and abiding extralinguistic referent whose existence is being denied. "Content", now redefined as the world, must be eternally renewed at each occasion and become one more level of "style". In this sense Aristotelian logic, deprived on its certain purchase on the truth, its claim to replicate a preexistent state of affairs, can be redefined, accordingly, as one among many stylistic possibilities available to the orator. Thought must always be on the move. Ethical and pathological proofs, the figurative language Aristotle regarded as mere ornament, can be understood to provide alternative varieties of "logical" proof. In this view, we would be able to stress that language is as much productive of reality, or persuasive on the basis of its own intrinsic resources, as it is a vehicle for representation.

Unless we see the changing, rather than the changeless in Aristotle, his Rhetoric may be argued out of existence or usefulness. I think I have shown that Aristotle's theory of rhetoric contains on its fringes another dimension, a world view of changing reality. This awaits to take hold in post-modern Aristotelian rhetoric.

NOTES

¹See Bernard Weinberg, "From Aristotle to Pseudo-Aristotle" in Elder Olson, ed. Aristotle's Poetics and English Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), pp. 192-200.

²For examples: W.D. Ross, Aristotle A Complete Exposition of His Works and Thought (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1959). A representation of his thought is as follows: "In understanding the book [Rhetoric] it is essential to bear in mind its purely practical purpose. It is not a theoretical work on any of these subjects [logic, ethics, politics]; it is a manual for the speaker" (p. 27). See also, R.P.J. Corbett, Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965). He writes, "Advertising. . . is perhaps the best example of an activity that practices what Aristotle preached" (p. 31).

³A few representing this view: William M.A. Grimaldi, S.J., Studies in the Philosophy of Aristotle's Rhetoric (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlagsgmbh, 1972); Christopher Lyle Johnstone, "An Aristotelian Trilogy: Ethics, Rhetoric, Politics, and the search for Moral Truth," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 13, 1980, 1-24; Arthur B. Miller and John D. Bee, "Enthymemes: Body and Soul," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 5, 1972, 201-215; and John Poulakos, "Rhetoric, the Sophists, and the Possible," Communication Monographs, 51, 1984, 215-224.

⁴Grimaldi, Aristotle's Rhetoric I A Commentary (New York: Fordham University Press, 1980), p. 29.

⁵See Poulakos (above) and Abraham Edel, Aristotle and His Philosophy (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

⁶Edel, p. 30.

⁷Here the idea of change is linked to acceleration or change of motion, not to motion itself.

⁸For discussion, see Michael J. Buckley, S.J., Motion and Motion's God (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971); and Edward Hussey, Aristotle's Physics (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

⁹See Mario Untersteiner, The Sophists, trans. Kathleen Freeman (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1954), p. 24; and Edward Hussey, The Pre-Socratics (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), pp. 32-59, 60-106.

¹⁰Aristotle, Metaphysics [1010a 9], trans. Richard Hope (Ann

Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1952.

¹¹ Metaphysics [1010a 10-15].

¹² Metaphysics [1008b 10-20].

¹³ Metaphysics [1012b 25-30]: "for the speaker himself at one time was not and again will not be."

¹⁴ Aristotle Politics [1268a 25-34], trans. B. Jovett in The Complete Works of Aristotle, Vol. II, Ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

¹⁵ Metaphysics [1010a 28-30]: "For it is only the region of what is sensible round about ourselves that is continually in process of destruction and generation."

¹⁶ Aristotle, Physics [253a32-b2], trans. R.P. Hardie and R.K. Gaye in The Complete Works of Aristotle, Vol. I.

¹⁷ Aristotle, Progression of Animals [704b 15-17], trans. A.S.L. Farquharson in The Complete Works of Aristotle, Vol. I.

¹⁸ For discussion, see Edel, p. 74.

¹⁹ My assumption in that Aristotle's texts can be divided into two layers: Infrastructure (bottom, foundation, cause and superstructure (top, effect). Aristotle's vision of the universe which is articulated through the concept of motion, is the steady prop and plays the primary value in upholding his logic, ethics, and politics. Accordingly, rhetoric, too, is the consequent to the bottom. Naturally, the theory of rhetoric adapted itself to the infrastructure.

²⁰ Physics [254a 24-34].

²¹ Buckley, p. 33.

²² Physics [254a 24-34].

²³ Jacqueline de Romilly, Magic and Rhetoric in Ancient Greece (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975). She argues that "most of the traditional part of rhetoric were gradually absorbed by logic and thereby lost their importance" (p. 70). See also Paul Ricoeur, The Rule of Metaphor, trans. Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello, S.J. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977). Ricoeur writes that rhetoric was thrown into a collusion course with the Topics, which made the art the pursuit of argument motifs (pp. 29-30). Extending this line of thinking is Jane Sutton, "The Death of Rhetoric and Its Rebirth in Philosophy," Rhetorica, 4, 1986, 203-226.

*Metaphysics [1028a 10].

*Aristotle, De Interpretatione [16a 4-8], trans. J.L. Ackrill in The Complete Works of Aristotle, Vol. I.